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**TEACHING ABOUT ASIA****Imagining Modern India:  
The Genesis and Goals of a  
Course-in-the-Making**

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By training I am a South Asianist, specializing in the transformation of Hindu traditions during the colonial and postcolonial era. However, when I joined the Religion Department at Illinois Wesleyan University in 1992, I was the sole 'Asianist.' As such I was asked to provide coverage of the religious traditions of both South and East Asia. Accordingly, over the years I created a range of lower- and upper-level courses dedicated to such topics as 'Asian Religious Literature,' 'Asian Religious Practice,' and 'Religion in Contemporary Japan,' along with selected courses focusing on South Asia and Hinduism.

The recent addition to our department of an East Asia specialist (Professor Jin Tao), has allowed me to turn more of my attention to the teaching of South Asia. Simultaneously, a sabbatical leave during 2006-07, during which I returned to West Bengal for research, inspired me to develop a new course that would address some of the issues that stand behind India's remarkable transformation over the past several decades. Comparing my most recent trip to India with my first visit in 1986-87, I decided it might be worthwhile developing a course that explored the origin and meaning of guiding concepts like *Swadeshi* and *Swaraj*, while playing these off the kinds of values that have come to the fore in India after economic liberalization,

the rise of globalization, outsourcing, call centers, and hi-rise apartments.

As I saw it, the course would not attempt a straightforward history of modern India as much as provide an intensive introduction to the guiding voices and conflicting ideals that make India what it is. Let Gandhi and Tagore face off; throw Amedkar into the mix. Read Nehru and then consider Gurcharan Das. Ponder the wonders of India's development against the backdrop of Arundhati Roy's critique. Not only is this likely to be the first time students encounter such figures, but such debates raise pressing questions even today. I admit that in many ways it represents an odd fit within a Religion Department curriculum, but at the same time this course helps expand the curriculum in Asian Studies at IWU. And as I see it, the consistent emphasis on exploring the visions and values, the philosophies and works of art that contribute to the imagining of modern India makes this an ideal humanities course.

I offered the course for the first time in the spring of 2008 under a rubric for experimental courses. It was under-enrolled and nowhere near fully realized in all its parts. Nevertheless, the few students I had seemed to love it and I thought it showed promise. I went ahead and proposed it for a regular course number and offered it again the following spring. The syllabus that follows is from the spring of 2009. I have to say that I remain disappointed with the syllabus on all levels—basic coverage, range of readings, formal assignments, etc. The premium I place on engaging with complete works (such as novels) necessarily means time taken away from canvassing more material, such as one might get from an anthology like *Sources of Indian Tradition*, volume 2. I also privilege primary texts over secondary scholarship, meaning both basic history and more advanced postcolonial readings do not really get their due. Finally, of course, there is the problem of including as many voices as possible. I am not satisfied with my coverage of Muslim intellectuals. I may go back to a novel I have taught before, Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*, but would welcome suggestions from readers.

Beyond these concerns, I fear the course suffers from a genetic flaw of my own doing. On the one hand, I want it to offer what is for most students a first-time exposure to India; I want it to hook their interest, get them reading, watching, and listening to as many dimensions of modern Indian culture as possible. But on the other hand, I have given the course an upper-division number, so it ought to include not just significant reading but also serious student research. While research work is included in the current iteration, I know it could be improved. What is the best way to achieve a good balance between my overall objectives?

In its introductory mode, the provision of a chance for students to ‘brief’ the class on topics of interest has proven popular. Naturally, we have had our presentations on *Slumdog Millionaire* and have watched our share of YouTube videos, but we have also heard reports on the Communist Party of India, the songs of Lata Mangeshkar, and the Narmada Bachao Andolan. Looking toward its upper-level mode, the two book review projects are my attempt, early in the semester, both to expose students to the range of academic writing on India and to develop their skills at processing sophisticated scholarship (I provide a list of possible books to consider at the end of the syllabus). I cannot say there has been an obvious payoff in terms of a higher standard in the research papers, but I do think reading and commenting on scholarly reviews has helped students get a better appreciation for scholarship as argument. Nonetheless, the research papers, even as sequenced over the final weeks of the semester, remain hit-and-miss. But that is not unique to this course, I know.

Some may question my decision to assign only South Asian authors in the required readings. I admit that it is a rather artificial constraint, not without problematic theoretical implications. I would only say that what this allows me to do is to put India in the spotlight for students with little or no prior knowledge of its history, literature, politics, or religion. Naturally, early in the course, when discussing India and Europe and the problem of colonialism, issues of Western Orientalism and the construction

of India are raised. Such concerns serve to provide tools for reflection throughout the course; after all, one cannot really read *Hind Swaraj* as merely an ‘Indian’ work. And certainly in the research paper, students are given free rein to use and interrogate all sources relevant to their topic.

With this brief preamble, I offer the syllabus to the readers of *ASIANetwork Exchange* for their consideration. Needless to say, the course remains a work in progress. I hope readers may find some ideas in it that intersect with aspects of their own teaching. For my part, I would particularly welcome suggestions for ways to improve the course, pedagogically as much as at the level of content. For those of you working in other fields—like media, gender studies, or visual culture—how would you encourage students to imagine modern India?

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### Imagining Modern India

Religion 309

Spring, 2009

Professor Brian A. Hatcher

Over sixty years into its existence as an independent nation, India faces a variety of challenges, from poverty to illiteracy to politicized religion and communal violence. But with a growing economy, a rising middle class, and nuclear capability, 21<sup>st</sup>-century India is also emerging as a major economic and strategic player. Just what is the story of modern India? How have Indians attempted to define their nation? What can we learn about India from studying the many acts of imagination that have contributed to its identity? And how might this help us appreciate India’s role in the contemporary world?

India’s postcolonial identity turns upon a variety of overlapping and often conflicting ideals: patriotism and internationalism, democracy and socialism, industrial development and village handicrafts, religious pluralism and Hindu nationalism, to name but a few. This course examines a

range of political, moral, religious, and artistic voices that have contributed to the shaping of modern India, from Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi to Amartya Sen and Arundhati Roy. As Martha Nussbaum has noted, ‘a liberal state needs public poetry’ (*The Conflict Within*, 2007). In this course, students will meet some of India’s greatest public poets. In fact, we will give preference throughout to Indian voices, rather than the voices of outsiders commenting on modern India (rich and important though this literature is). On one level, the course offers students a chance to discover the complexities and marvels of modern India; on another level, it encourages students to think of India as an ‘imagiNation,’ to borrow the coinage of Shanti Kumar in his book *Gandhi Meets Primetime* (2005).

This course will be run largely as a seminar, with a premium placed on reading and discussion. Active student participation is essential!

### **Course requirements and grade percentages:**

Preparation for and participation in class discussion	——20%
One in-class briefing	——10%
Two book review projects (15% each)	——30%
Research project (topic/thesis/biblio=10%; final paper=30%)	——40%

### **Books for purchase:**

- Bankimchandra Chatterjee, *Anandamath, or the Sacred Brotherhood*, trans. J. Lipner
- M. K. Gandhi, *Gandhi: Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, edited by Anthony J. Parel
- Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian*
- Khushwant Singh, *Train to Pakistan*
- Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World* (Penguin Classics edition, 2005)
- Omprakash Valmiki, *Joothan*

**E-reserves:**

- Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence* (pp. 29-52, 53-65, 109-125)
- Partha Chatterjee, 'The Moment of Departure: Culture and Power in the Thought of Bankimchandra,' ch. 3 of his *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*
- Partha Chatterjee, 'Whose Imagined Community?', ch. 1 of his *The Nation and its Fragments*
- Harold Coward, 'Gandhi, Ambedkar, and Untouchability,' in his *Indian Critiques of Gandhi*
- Stephen Hay, *Sources of Indian Tradition*, vol. 2, pp. 324-48.
- Ashis Nandy, 'Final Encounter: The Politics of the Assassination of Gandhi' in A. Raghuramaraju, *Debating Gandhi*
- Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, ch. 3
- Jawaharlal Nehru, *Oxford India Nehru* (pp. 3-48, 110-137, 207-210, 263-294)
- Arundhati Roy, 'The End of Imagination' in her *The Cost of Living*. 93-126.

**Book review project**

At two points during the semester, each student will submit a **three-page** review of the critical responses to a recent monograph dedicated to some aspect of contemporary India (for some ideas, see the selection of titles at the end of this syllabus). After first familiarizing themselves with the contents and basic argument of the work they have chosen, students must find and read two critical (preferably scholarly) reviews of the book. The review they submit should include (1) complete bibliographic details for the book they have chosen as well as for the two reviews read, listed at the top of page one; (2) a brief précis identifying the author and argument of the book; and (3) a summary of the critical reception of the book. What have critics said about it? Have they praised it? If so, why? Have they found fault with it? If so, why? Do critics agree on the value of the book? Can you relate this book to the concerns

of other books or authors? Would this book be of interest to other students in this course? If so, why? Photocopies of the two reviews must be attached to the review you submit. NOTE: every effort should be made to find scholarly reviews from recognized professional journals; failing this, recourse can be made to established review sources such as *New York Review of Books*, *Times Literary Supplement*, *Economic and Political Weekly* or the *New York Times Book Review*. Short book notes, brief notices from popular sources, or random internet reviews will not be accepted. **DUE DATES: the first review must be submitted on or before February 27; the second must be submitted on or before March 30.**

### **Briefing**

Students will present to the class a short briefing (approx. 10 mins.) on a major figure, movement, or historical moment in modern Indian history not directly covered in the regular course readings. These briefings have two goals: One, to deepen familiarity with modern Indian history; two, to promote collective discussion by relating the briefing to issues or concerns taken up in the course. Suggested topics for briefings are listed at the end of the syllabus. Note: each student must choose topics from two of the four major categories listed in the syllabus or receive the instructor's permission for a topic of their own choosing. To assist in preparing for briefings, students will receive a handout indicating the type and range of information they will be expected to present. Briefings will be graded on the evidence of careful preparation and on the quality of the presentation. Have you provided an accurate and representative portrait? Have you presented material in a clear and engaging manner? Have you tried to connect your briefing to issues raised in this course? Have you raised questions for the class to consider?

### **Research project**

As a final exercise, students will write an **8-10 page** essay exploring a topic of their own choice related to the issues raised

by this course. The project is intended to promote careful research and critical analysis of a social issue, political movement, artistic work, historical event, or major figure relevant to the construction of modern Indian identity. The project will be staged across the final weeks of the semester and will require initial identification of topic, creation of a preliminary bibliography, and submission of the final essay. Further information will be provided on sequencing your work and formatting the paper, as well as on grading criteria.

### **Classroom policies**

Please respect your instructor and your classmates. Turn off your cellphone before class. If you wish to bring a drink to class, that's fine, but please avoid bringing in food. If you are sick, please do not come to class or to my office; if necessary, go to the health service. If you need to miss class for an IWU event, I should be notified by your coach or program director. If you have to miss class or leave campus for a family emergency, please inform the Dean of Students office. They will notify all your instructors on your behalf.

### **Course Schedule**

Wed., 1/7 Introduction

Fri., 1/9 Visual tour: India 1987/India 2007

Read: Sen, chs. 1-2

Mon., 1/12 Film: 'India Rising' PBS Now, with David

Brancaccio (30mins)

Read: Sen, chs. 3-4

Wed., 1/14 Europe in India

Read: Sen, chs. 6-7

Fri., 1/16 Theorizing Colonialism and Nationalism

Read: Chatterjee, 'Whose Imagined Community?'

### **Swadeshi**

Mon., 1/19 Bengal and Bankim

Read: Lipner, 3-26

Recommended: Chatterjee, 'The Moment of  
Departure'

Wed., 1/21 Discuss *Anandamath*

Fri., 1/23 Discuss *Anandamath*

Sunday, 1/25: FILM: 'Mangal Pandey: The Rising' '  
(Beckman Auditorium)

Mon., 1/26 Bande Mataram: Song, Anthem, Icon  
Read: Lipner, pp. 59-108

Wed., 1/28 Tagore and Swadeshi  
Read: Sen, ch. 5

Fri., 1/30 **Briefings**

Mon., 2/2 Discuss *The Home and the World*

Wed., 2/4 Discuss *The Home and the World*

Fri., 2/6 **Briefings**

Mon., 2/9 Film: 'The Home and the World' (scenes)

Wed., 2/11 Film: 'The Home and the World' (scenes)

Fri., 2/13 **Briefings**

### **Swaraj**

Sun., 2/15 FILM: 'Shatranj ke khilari' '  
(Beckman Auditorium)

Mon., 2/16 Film: "Gandhi: End of an Empire"

Wed., 2/18 NO CLASS

Read: *Hind Swaraj*, pp. xiii-1

Fri., 2/20 **Briefings**

Mon., 2/23 Discuss *Hind Swaraj*

Wed., 2/25 Discuss *Hind Swaraj*

Fri., 2/27 **Briefings**

**Last day to turn in Book Review #1**

### **Partition**

Mon., 3/2 FILM: 'Division of Hearts'

Wed., 3/4 Discuss *Train to Pakistan*

Fri., 3/6 **Briefings**

Mon., 3/9 Recovering Partition

Read: Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence*, pp. 29-52

Wed., 3/11 Memories of Partition

Read: Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence*, 53-65,  
109-125

Fri., 3/13 **Briefings**

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*3/16-20 Spring Break*

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### **Independence**

Mon., 3/23 Film: '*Gandhi*,' dir. R. Attenborough (scenes)

Wed., 3/25 Discuss Nandy, 'The Final Encounter'

Fri., 3/27 **Library work on research projects**

Mon., 3/30 Nehru's quest

Read: Nehru, *Discovery of India*, ch. 3

**Last day to turn in Book Review #2**

Wed., 4/1 Nehru's India

Read: *Oxford India Nehru*, pp. 3-48, 110-137

Fri., 4/3 Nehru, Independence, and Gandhi

Read: *Oxford India Nehru*, pp. 207-210, 263-294

**Research project—topic due**

### **Power and oppression**

Sun., 4/5 *FILM: 'Sholay' (Beckman Auditorium)*

Mon., 4/6 Inequality in India

Read: Amartya Sen, chs. 10-11

Wed., 4/8 Ambedkar, Untouchability, and the Indian Constitution

Read: Hay, *Sources of Indian Tradition*, pp. 324-48

Fri., 4/10 Gandhi and Ambedkar

Read: Coward, 'Gandhi, Ambedkar, and Untouchability'

Mon., 4/13 Discuss Valmiki, *Joothan*

Wed., 4/15 Discuss Valmiki, *Joothan*

Fri., 4/17 Discussion of Arundhati Roy, 'The End of Imagination'

**Research project—bibliography and thesis due**

Mon., 4/20 Wrapping up

Fri., 4/24: **Research project due by 4 pm**

**Some recent titles on modern India for possible book review projects**

- Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed* (2004)  
 Rajmohan Gandhi, *Revenge and Reconciliation: Understanding South Asian History* (1999)  
 Leela Fernandes, *India's New Middle Class* (2006)  
 Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (2004)  
 Ramachandra Guha, *India after Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (2007)  
 Dipankar Gupta, *Mistaken Modernity: India between Worlds* (2000)  
 Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (1999)  
 Sudhir Kakar, *The Colours of Violence* (1996)  
 Suvir Kaul, *Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India* (2002)  
 Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (2007)  
 Shanti Kumar, *Gandhi Meets Primetime* (2005)  
 Pankaj Mishra, *Temptations of the West* (2007)  
 V. S. Naipaul, *India: A Million Mutinies Now* (1992)  
 Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self* (1994)  
 P. V. Narasimha Rao, *Ayodhya: 6 December 1992* (2006)  
 Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions: The Anti-Caste Movement and the Construction of an Indian Identity* (rev. ed., 2006)  
 Gyandendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (2006)  
 Gyandendra Pandey, *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories* (2006)  
 Arvind Rajagopal, *Politics after Television: Religious Nationalism and the Making of a Hindu Public* (2001)  
 Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism* (2001)  
 Aseema Sinha, *The Regional Roots of Developmental Politics in India: A Divided Leviathan* (2005)  
 Lisa Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi's Nation: Homespun and Modern India* (2007)  
 Pavan Varma, *The Great Indian Middle Class* (1998)  
 Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (2003)